(a) whether VSNL has made investment in an American based company "IRIDIUM LLC" for international satellite communications;

(b) whether the company has been declared as bankrupt;

(c) how much amount was invested by VSNL; and

(d) the steps taken to recover the amount ?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN) : (a) to (c) No, Sir. VSNL has not made any investment in the equity capital of "Iridium LLC". However, VSNL spent Rs. 50 crores during 1998-99 towards setting up facilities for the Gateway commissioned within VSNL premises for Iridium India telecom Limited (IITL) at Pune, which was capitalized by VSNL. IITL was charged by VSNL for operation & Maintenance of these equipments.

(d) Iridium LLC filed for bankruptcy under Chapter 11 of the US Bankruptcy code in 1st August, 1999. VSNL is in the process of identifying alternative use of the equipment acquired by it.

Penalties on FCI Employees

*354. PROF. (SHRIMATI) BHARATI RAY : Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state :

(a) whether arbitrary means are being used by the FCI to recover losses from the employees that occur naturally during storage and transit of foodgrains;

(b) whether the FCI Union has threatened to intensify agitation for unnecessary penalising the employees; and

(c) if so, Government's reaction on their demands?

THE MINISTER OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHANTA KUMAR) : (a) to (c) The Food Corporation of India (FCI) makes allowances for storage and transit losses that occur due to factors like driage of moisture, multiple handling, long storage, long distance carriage, trans-shipment, etc. As per the policy circular issued in this Respect, recovery proceedings are to be resorted to only in cases of abnormal losses and action initiated against the delinquent officials under the relevant Staff Regulations.

Consequent upon recoveries being effected in some cases, the concerned employees/Union members approached the Court. Representations were also made to the FCI Management against the recoveries. The Management held

discussions with the Unions. A committee has been constituted to evaluate the factors responsible for storage/transit losses and quality complaint procedures and to make recommendations as to whether any change/amendment is warranted.

Stock position of wheat and rice

*355. SHRI AIMADUDDIN AHMED KHAN (DURRU) : Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state :

(a) the present stock position of wheat and rice with the Food Corporation of India;

(b) whether Government have procured more rice and wheat in 2000-2001; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHANTA KUMAR) : (a) The stock position of wheat and rice in the Central Pool is as under :—

(Fig. in lakh tonnes)

Wheat*	Rice*	Total*
357.97	265.03	623.00

*As on 1-11-2001

(b) and (c) Yes, Sir. The quantity of rice procured during 2000-2001 (Kharif Marketing Season) was 191.03 lakh tonnes as against 172.73 lakh tonnes during 1999-2000 (Kharif Marketing Season). Similarly, the quantity of wheat procured during 2000-2001 (Rabi Marketing Season) was 163.56 lakh tonnes as against 141.43 lakh tonnes during 1999-2000 (Rabi Marketing Season).

Clearance Commission on local cheques by Ghaziabad Postal Circle

*356. SHRI RAJU PARMAR : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that post offices in Ghaziabad Circle charge clearance commission on the cheques of local nationalised banks presented to them against PPF deposits etc. on the plea that these cheques are sent to Delhi for clearance; and